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Putting pupils at the heart of assessment

Children's rights in practice

Project: Consulting Pupils on the Assessment of their Learning
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Background

This project examined pupils' participation in their own assessment from a children's rights perspective. It demonstrated that when genuine opportunities for participating in and understanding assessment are presented, pupils engage in their learning and focus on their own progress. When policy makers use child-centred methods to consult children directly, children show the motivation and capacity to be involved in decision-making.

CPAL enshrined these principles within its own design and processes. KS2 and KS3 pupils advised on ethical informed consent and some of the research methods. They co-researched and co-interpreted aspects of the data. In addition to traditional survey methods, the project developed creative methods for use with pupils and teachers which incorporated E-consultation, focus groups, drawings, and pupils' digital recordings.

The project was designed to take account of the policy context in Northern Ireland, with its focus on pupil profiles and assessment for learning.

Children's rights and participation

Parents and teachers were asked their views on these themes.

Most teachers and school leaders supported the principle of children's rights in learning and assessment, but had an imperfect understanding of Article 12 of the UNCRC (the right to express a view and the right to have the view given due weight).

They identified lack of time, class size, accountability and curriculum constraints as barriers to full implementation of consultation and engagement.

Parents were largely supportive of their children's increasing participation in learning and assessment through AfL practices such as sharing learning objectives, negotiating success criteria, think time, 'no hands up', and formative feedback.

Some expressed reservations about self-assessment, and a significant percentage had little confidence in the value of peer assessment.

Findings

Children can be consulted directly by policy-makers on educational issues such as assessment policy and practice.	➤ Methods should be inclusive and adults should listen and respond to children's views.
When teachers' beliefs and their assessment for learning (AfL) practices come together, pupils benefit.	➤ Teachers need support to create participative classroom cultures based on genuine AfL.
Teachers and parents are generally supportive of children's rights.	➤ There are opportunities for increased awareness of how to apply and evaluate children's rights in practice.
Children can be involved as co-researchers in mainstream research projects in ways that enhance the inquiry and enshrine children's rights.	➤ This takes time and careful negotiation. We need a better understanding of the implications of engaging children more democratically in research.

Implications

Pupil profiles

Key Stage 2 pupils were consulted about the introduction of an annual pupil profile and how children's own views could be incorporated into it.

KS2 pupils indicated to policy-makers that a pupil profile should:

- be seen as a personal document as well as an academic one
- provide detailed teacher feedback to improve their learning
- help them and their parents and guardians to make good decisions about their progress and future schooling
- be child-friendly, attractive and colourful
- be written in readable, understandable language
- include a voluntary section for pupil self-assessment
- include a picture of a pupil's wider abilities and achievements
- contain 'best work' exemplars chosen by teacher and pupil together
- have a section completed by parents or guardians
- be given to the pupil throughout the year to give time for improvement
- encourage pupils to think well of themselves and their potential to achieve.

Assessment

KS3 pupils were asked about their experiences of AfL, what helped or hindered their learning and how they understood the language of assessment.

These pupils felt most positive about their assessment in classes where:

- they knew what they were supposed to do in any task, test or homework
- the teacher discussed with them how their work would be assessed
- they understood the language of assessment
- they knew how to assess their own work and practised doing so
- they could evaluate a classmate's work and tell them how to improve
- they were given positive feedback on what they had done okay or well
- positive comments came before any negative ones
- they were not made to feel embarrassed about their work
- they were told how to improve individually and could work out what they needed to do
- feedback was presented clearly and soon
- marks were accompanied by detailed comments
- any classmate's assessment was supported by the teacher's comments.

Pupils indicated that teachers who espoused the 'spirit' of AfL provided greater opportunities for genuine learning. Such teachers associated their commitment to child-centred values with having been afforded a say (or not) in their own childhood.

Pupils in classrooms where teachers showed evidence of coherence between the their beliefs and their AfL practices demonstrated more in-depth understanding of assessment principles and practices than those in classrooms where coherence was less evident, or where discussion of assessment was restricted to tests and examinations.

The research

The project comprised three interrelated studies, examining pupil profiles, AfL and teacher perspectives. It developed methods based on a unique and legally sound conceptualisation of Article 12 of UNCRC. 290 pupils were consulted across 9 schools. 157 teachers and school leaders and 180 parents were surveyed. 10 AfL teachers were engaged with in depth over time.

More information from: www.cpal.qub.ac.uk



www.tlrp.org

“When policy makers consult children directly, children show the motivation and capacity to be involved in decision-making”

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